

## THE LAYMAN IN THE SOCIAL ORDER.

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There has been in the last decade a growing interest in the progress of Christianity, and men and women in increasing numbers are giving their best thought and energies to it. This interest is shown also in the multitude of books which deal either with the task of world-wide evangelization or with problems of making Christianity more vital in our own land. It is a striking fact that just at this time when some of our leaders are stirring in our hearts the hope that at no distant day we are to make Christ known to all men everywhere, thus bringing the whole human race into one brotherhood and making every nation on the earth Christian like our own, there are others equally devout and far-seeing who are asking with all seriousness whether we are ever going to allow Christianity to make us brothers to one another here at home.

We commonly think of America as aggressively Christian. Few of us realize how far this is from the truth. South Carolina and Georgia are the only two states in the Union in which the Protestant denominations combined include in their membership as many as 40 per cent. of the population. Most of the states are far below this. For example, in Kansas, the Protestants constitute 22 per cent. of the population, the Roman Catholics, 5 per cent., all other Christian bodies 1 per cent., and there is 72 per cent. of the entire population belonging to no church whatever. And Kansas is above the average, being number twenty-one in the list of states. Even if we include with the Protestants their share of the children under ten years of age we find the Protestant element of the population increased in this way is still less than 30 per cent.

But many of those who are church members and who meet each other in worship on Sunday will, during the

rest of the week, grapple with their fellow men in forms of business conducted on anything but Christian principles,—business which is characterized by sharp competition, brutal selfishness and any sort of dishonesty which may by one trick or other be brought within the law. In our industrial enterprises which bring together vast aggregations of labor and capital there is often such flagrant injustice to the laboring man as to make class hatred inevitable; what chance has the spirit of Christ to grow in the heart of a man, who day in and day out, is cherishing hatred against his fellows? There is among the well-to-do much indifference as to this situation. In fact most of us know very little about it. But the laboring men are studying it with intense eagerness and concern. They are becoming suspicious of the church charging that it is indifferent to the injustices from which they are suffering and sometimes that it is under the control of those who are growing rich at the expense of the great army of toilers. Many of the men who toil for a living day after day and who so need the comfort and strength of Christian faith and Christian fellowship to cheer their lonely lives of monotonous drudgery—the very class of men whom Jesus most frequently had in mind have turned away from the church.

When we consider the fact that there are so many people in America who are outside of the church, and that many of those who are in the church are plunging into the national game of business selfishness in which their religion seems to be entirely inoperative we are confronted with a serious question. If the church is not developing in us a type of Christianity which is sufficiently robust to stand the strain of our modern business life, what appeal can we make to the millions of Americans who are without Christ? Can we ever hope to save our fellowmen here in America until we become sufficiently Christian to live with them on week days and do business with them on a Christian basis,—until we are willing to inter-

pret Christianity in our daily contact with them and not merely in the preaching which we employ our preachers to preach on Sundays?

There has been much written in the last few years about modern industry and the great changes which it is producing in the whole social order. Some of these changes are not only radical and far-reaching but have come about with great rapidity, producing a condition so acute that it is often spoken of as the modern social crisis. The present situation is so unprecedented and has come about with such suddenness that the church, we are told, has been taken unawares so that its present organization and methods are inadequate to deal with the situation. There are many communities in the South, however, which have in nowise been affected by modern industrialism and yet whose young men and boys have been snatched from the very doors of the churches and dragged down by intemperance and other evils. Such communities are unusually well supplied with churches. But these churches while deploring the unhappy fate of the youth of the neighborhood seemed not to think it their business to remedy the social conditions which were responsible for the disorder. It would seem that the fundamental difficulty all along has been that the church is not sufficiently awake to its social responsibility. This defect is more apparent now than formerly because economic conditions have grown up which have greatly intensified class hatred and revealed to us more clearly that unless we can find some way to Christianize the social order it will become more and more a menace to spiritual life.

Modern industry has undoubtedly brought about radical changes in the conditions of the laboring class. In former times there were multitudes of workers of various sorts who lived in their own homes and did their work either in the home or in shops on the premises. They controlled their own time, they produced on the place or secured by purchase the raw materials, they owned the

machinery with which they manufactured various articles, and they were at liberty to sell the finished product wherever they could do so most advantageously. There was sufficient variety in the work to make it interesting, and it often required judgment and taste in its execution, and thus had a broadening influence on the workers. Moreover it afforded the family a living and gave them economic independence.

But science came along with its miracle of modern co-operation and with its invention of machinery, and gathered all these small industries into great manufacturing centers. The men had to follow. But now they work in other men's shops and with machinery which they do not own. They do not buy the raw material nor sell the finished product and thus are cut off from both of these contacts with society. They do not design the article which is being manufactured. Indeed they do not make the article; they merely mind the great machine which makes it. It is a life which cramps and shrivels personality because it makes no demand upon it and affords no room for its exercise. But worst of all, if anything could be worse than the benumbing monotony of such a life, these men and their families have been dragged into economic slavery.

Human labor is just as necessary a factor in production as land or capital or managing ability and surely is as much entitled to its share of the earnings as any of the other three. There might be difference of opinion as to how large a share labor is entitled to. But when a man gets only enough to live on during the very best years of his life, with no provision for old age or for injury or death from dangerous machinery, when moreover he has to put his wife and children into the factory, and even then their combined earnings are not sufficient to provide suitable housing conditions, but families must be herded together like cattle in a stockyard under conditions which inevitably breed filth and disease both phys-

ical and moral, either the business is too inefficient to be tolerated in this day of economic efficiency, or else this man and his family are giving a good portion of their time to somebody for nothing. Considering the fact that the other parties interested are unusually far above want, it is easy to guess what becomes of the laboring man's wages. We do well to remember, however, that the injustice extends beyond the matter of wages. Why should we assume it as axiomatic that when a lot of people and a lot of machinery go into co-partnership of this kind all the profits should go to the machinery? From the Christian point of view the trouble is that while labor is only one of the four factors in production, and the only one which does not get its share of the proceeds, it represents ten times as much human life as all the other three combined. This injustice, therefore, while building up a few fortunes does so at the expense of a vast amount of human life. But this physical and moral wastage of human life is not the only evil effect of this injustice to the laboring man. It is producing class hatreds so bitter and on such a vast scale as to constitute the chief barrier to the Christianizing of America.

There are many of us who have little or no appreciation of this situation. When it is thrust upon our attention we merely ask if the factory owners have violated the law, and if it can be shown that they have not, we think that this should be a complete answer to all those turbulent labor agitators. But our laws too often are framed and administered in the interest not of personality, but of property. We will vote large sums out of the public treasury for the eradication of disease among cattle, but it is difficult to get a tenth as much for preventing the spread of tuberculosis among people. And why? Because the cattle can be sold for a hundred dollars a head. There is a mining region in America in which there has not been paid a single cent in damages for injury or death from machinery for twenty-three years. The courts in-

variably decide in favor of the mine owners and against the mine workers,—in favor of property and against personality.

Many of the wastrels of society are not deliberately so, but are the direct and legitimate product of social injustice of one kind or another. There are many Christians who are quick to minister to the sufferings of these victims of injustice and yet who feel no responsibility for the conditions which produce all this misery. In fact it often happens that the man who owns a business that is flagrantly unjust to its employees will give generously of his means to the sick and suffering. As a business man he makes everything bend to making money and plays the game strictly according to the rules. His Christianity expresses itself in charity rather than in justice. What the laboring man wants is not charity but justice. It is humiliating to a man to become dependent upon charity; but it is nothing short of exasperating to him to feel that he has been brought to want and suffering by being the victim of injustice put upon him by the very people who are now throwing him a little charity. Thus there is a growing number of men who are cherishing a grudge against the well-to-do who own the factories and control the courts and—as they allege—run the churches. This is doing incalculable damage to their finer natures and is putting them wholly out of reach of the gospel message. And yet there are some who tell us that the church has nothing to do with correcting social injustice. Isn't it as much the business of Christianity to give justice to the man in the shop as to give charity to the beggar on the street? One of the greatest needs in the religious life of America today is for our laymen to see more clearly that a man's Christianity must determine his normal rather than abnormal relations with his fellows. This means that it is far more important for his Christianity to express itself in his continual business relationships than in his occasional meeting a beggar on the street.

There are many Christians who seem little aware of the obligation either of the individual Christian or of organized Christianity to the social order. We not only have a very contracted notion of social service, limiting it to merely occasional ministry to the unfortunate members of society, but we give it a secondary place in our program of Christian activities. In fact there are many people apparently Christians, who discredit the whole matter of social ministry alleging that it has no Christianity in it. If this be so whose fault is it? Whom is Jesus depending on to put any Christianity into it? No fair-minded man can study the life and teachings of Jesus without realizing that they are throbbing with the social message. He made no attempt to formulate a social program ready made to fit all sorts of social conditions that ever shall arise. He set little store by rules anyway. But he gave far-reaching principles which are enduring as human nature, and he relies on the good sense and loyalty of his followers in each generation to apply them to the problems as they arise. His message was spiritual and made its fundamental appeal to the inner life of man. But while his message of life was to the soul of a man, his test of life was social adjustment every time.

A Jewish lawyer came to Jesus one day with the question, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" and it was in answer to this question that he told the story which has become the most familiar one in all the New Testament,—one that we know so well and understand so little. It was the story of a priest and a Levite and a Samaritan and a fellowman who needed their help. Most of us are so absorbed in the climax of this story that we hardly take a second look at the priest and the Levite. How few of us stop to inquire why they hurried on by so, and left to the Samaritan this task of relieving human suffering. They were specializing in religion, and it was not to be expected that they should turn aside from their specialty to bother with folks. And they turned away

from the most precious thing on this earth, namely human personality. They turned away from human life to sit up with a corpse—a dead religion. And any religion is dead which has no time to bother with folks. Many modern priests and Levites read this story and never connect it with the question that was asked. How may I enter into life? the lawyer asked; and Jesus opened the door of unselfish service to one's fellowman and bade him enter in.

The Jewish conception of the reign of Jehovah was confined almost wholly to this present world. The Christian church throughout much of its history has transferred the thought almost entirely to the world that is to be. Jesus had the two-world view, and in His teachings the two were constantly blended. This life assumes all the more importance because of its relation to the life to come. It is because this finite life is to be projected into the infinite and there holds infinite possibilities that Jesus set such a high value on human personality. And He seems to take it for granted that human life will be precious in the eyes of any man as soon as he recognizes his own relation as sonship to God. Our having fellowship with Christ therefore implies that we are identified with Him in this attitude toward all human life.

Are we willing that our right to be called followers of Jesus shall be determined by the extent to which we share His reverence for human life, and that our value to the world as Christians shall be gauged by the influence which our life has on the lives that we touch from day to day in our normal habitual contacts with the world? Is the church doing its duty in holding up this ideal to laymen? There are some who apply only two tests to determine a man's status in the church, namely, that he should be sound in doctrine and pure in life. But the most passive Christians, even some very selfish ones, can easily meet these two tests. If Christianity is to mean anything at all, a Christian ought to bear some resemblance to his Master, and this means that he must give evidence of the



spirit of service. But is it not true that by service many persons mean loyalty to church organizations rather than ministry to human lives? We need to enlarge our conception of Christian work. Many a man will devote a small portion of his income to the church program and snatch a few hours a week from his business life to serve on church committees, and he thinks of this alone as religious work. In fact we are apt to determine a man's value as a Christian by the amount of money and time he is willing thus to divert from the main current of his life rather than by the impact which his life is making on the world through his normal contacts with people. Giving of one's means for the support of the gospel is a high and sacred duty and there is growing need to emphasize this; but it is in administering the rest of the income that a man is brought into the most vital relations with men. Attending church services on Sunday ought to contribute much to the deepening of a man's spiritual life, but it is on Mondays and on through the week that his associations with the world are most normal and real, and afford the best opportunity for his spiritual life to be potent in awakening spiritual life in others.

Do we realize that a layman's main chance for making his life count for the Kingdom is in the vocation which he has chosen, in the sphere in which day after day he is coming into contact with other human lives; and that next to surrendering the allegiance of his heart to the Master, the highest obligation he owes to Christ is to choose his vocation with reference to this, and aggressively to use these natural contacts with men for the extension of Christ's kingdom? Is the church timid about putting the emphasis here? We sometimes say that our men of large business interests are under such continuous pressure that they get little time to "work at religion." But how do we get the idea that a man must necessarily drop his business in order to do religious work? He may have ten-fold greater opportunities to render service to the

Kingdom inside of his business than out of it, if only he could be led to realize and utilize this opportunity. Our habit of thinking that we are not doing religious work except when we suspend our ordinary activities and withdraw from our habitual and normal contacts with people and get inside of the church and take part in prayer meeting or serve on committees or give to missions and the like is seriously hindering the progress of Christianity. Because in the first place it often amounts to this, that Christian people are consciously religious on Sundays when they are associating with one another and quite otherwise on Mondays when they go out into the world and touch elbows with folks. In the second place, if Christian service is occasional, spasmodic, discontinuous, it tends to make one's spiritual growth irregular and uncertain. In the third place character develops best when it is expressing itself in the most natural ways. Now a man's religion ought to set up for him his standards of action; but they will never issue in character unless they become operative in the sphere in which he is acting. It is important for one to be on the right side of a question which is up for discussion in the Bible class when he is at church with his Sunday clothes on; but the development to his character comes in taking the right stand when he is dealing with a fellowman in a transaction in which his interests are at stake. Thus, if a man is putting his very life into his business—as many men are today—he must extend the sphere not only of his Christian conduct, but of his Christian service to the very core of his business or it cannot get into the center of his life and direct it to the achievement of robust spiritual character. Moreover, there are multitudes of the unsaved whom we cannot get at except in business and whom we can never save if our religion is of that variety which automatically shuts off as soon as we step into the business atmosphere.

On a mountain side that overlooks the city there is a reservoir filled with pure, sparkling water. The mains

are already laid to every section of the city and these are connected by a net-work of pipes with the houses. People all through the city are perishing from thirst, and some faithful men and women are running back and forth with buckets of water trying to save a few of the perishing thousands. Why do they not lift the water-gate and use the means already provided for conveying the water? Think of the great host of men and women in our country who have been quickened into life by the indwelling Spirit of Christ, and think of the enormous amount of spiritual energy that is pent up in their personalities. Consider also how their lives are intertwined through a network of business relationships with the entire population. Why do we not more regularly turn spiritual power into these channels which are ready to hand, and utilize these natural contacts which we have with people for giving them the message of life? In some way we must be brought to see that it is the duty of every one of us to choose such a vocation and to use it in such ways as will best facilitate the extending and strengthening of Christ's Kingdom, and to make the Christian life and program attractive to all the people who are connected with or affected by the business which we are conducting. There are several obvious corollaries to this proposition: (1) No Christian may conduct any business which thrives at the expense of the physical or moral well-being of the community. A business, for example, which feeds on young lives is unthinkable as a career for a Christian. He must also resolutely turn away from all temptation to deal in adulterated foods, immoral books, habit-forming drinks and the like. Whether the business is legal or illegal does not make the slightest difference. (2) No Christian should conduct a business which is not honest through and through. Short weights and measures, shoddy goods which appear to be what they are not, the old grindstone in the bale of cotton, the misleading advertisement, the patent medicines which are sold to the ignorant with no

thought that they will cure disease and all the rest of the shameful list, have no place in a business through which a man is seeking to render Christian service to the world.

(3) A Christian's business should be worth to the community at least as much as it costs. A man who sits in an office and deals in cotton futures, who never hoed a row of cotton, or owned a pound of it, or transported it for others, or manufactured it, but who is merely betting on the price of it, is rendering no service to society. His business is purely fictitious; but he is eating three good meals a day which he has no sort of right to, but which ought to be turned over to somebody who is doing an honest job for the community. (4) No Christian should conduct a business on a basis which works injustice to employees. For a man cannot be unjust to his fellows without suffering deterioration in his own life. Moreover, our economic injustice is not only producing a vast amount of poverty and disease and crime, but it is producing class antagonisms which are working untold harm in our country. (5) No Christian should be an idler, no matter how great a fortune he may possess. From the Christian point of view, creating wealth is a trivial thing in comparison with achieving personality and this can be done only in normal functioning. No idler ever built a character. But there is more than the obligation to build one's own character. The doctrine of stewardship has its largest and most important application in the sphere, not of money, but of personal influence and service. The greatest contribution a man can make to society is the gift of a noble personality. But this cannot be done at all effectively by a layman unless he is taking his place in the affairs of the world so as to mingle with men under normal conditions. In other words, a servant of Christ must seek a career in order to be a servant of man, whether he needs the career for making his own living or not.

There are many ways in which Christians as individuals may use their vocations as the channels through

which their most effective service may be rendered in establishing the Kingdom on earth. We have been too much accustomed to think of this as the incidental and occasional expression of the Christian life and as more or less voluntary, whereas it ought to be the normal and habitual expression of Christian service and one that is obligatory on every one of us.

But the progress of the world has been mainly through co-operative rather than individual effort. This is especially characteristic of the present day. Our progress is being greatly accelerated chiefly because we are learning better how to work together for common ends. Moreover, co-operative effort is more important the higher we rise in the sphere of human interest; it is supremely important in the spiritual realm. Man has changed the world immensely through the centuries. Some of this has been done by individual workers, each toiling away in his own little place. But the larger progress has always been through collective effort. In this working together for common ends, man is developing a social nature and building a social order—a task which is by no means finished yet. In fact, we have not succeeded in directing our social forces as well as we have succeeded in uncovering the mysteries of the physical sciences, or building our railroads or developing our agriculture. We have transformed the physical world, we can fashion iron and stone; but we are not succeeding so well with the fabric which we call the social order. We are dealing here with human life, and not with wood or stone or metals. Is it not probable that we need God's co-operation in this task in a higher sense than we need it in agriculture or architecture? The truth seems to be that this collective life of man is about as much in need of salvation as the individual life.

There are doubtless many good people who hold the view that Christianity is concerned only with the individual, and they are limiting its sphere without being at all aware of it. According to this view, when we have ac-

cepted Jesus and have adjusted our individual relationships with one another to harmonize with the will of Christ, we have fulfilled our social obligation as Christians, and all we need for social redemption is to persuade enough people to do this. This may sound well, but the stubborn fact is, it doesn't work. Men cannot maintain with each other, as individuals, relationships that are in harmony with the ideals of Jesus, when they are inextricably linked up with each other in political and economic group relationships that are in direct and open conflict with these ideals. For example, many a Christian is upright in his life and just to all other individuals, and moreover, is the soul of kindness in his home, in his church, in his community, and even in his place of business; but his business is organized from top to bottom with no reference to the value and sacredness of human life and in flagrant violation of every principle of justice to the employees. It is a business which does not hesitate to sacrifice personality in the interest of creating material wealth. It widens the gulf between groups of population, intensifies class hatred among men, making impossible the growth of the spirit of brotherhood, and contributes to the growing volume of disease and crime and to the wastage of human life.

Surely all Christians will agree that it is the will of God that the whole life of man shall be organized around those ideals which He has revealed to us in His Son. But the whole life must include the corporate life. There are great social forces which may be turned toward spiritual ends if they are consciously controlled and directed with this in view, but which, in the hands of the vicious, become an engine of death, and put vast multitudes of people practically beyond the reach of all spiritual influence. There are social conditions in our day which have become intolerable. The only way out of our difficulties is for the collective life, as well as the individual lives, to be brought under the sway of Christ. Most of us recognize that

individual injustice is a sin against God and a crime against society. When an individual robs his fellow-man we promptly put him in prison, but when we manage to accomplish the same thing by "team work," we legalize it and persuade ourselves that this makes it right.

When we go to the teachings of Jesus in search of the principles of constructing a social order in harmony with God's will, we find that the fundamental ideal of Jesus is this: The most precious thing on this earth is a human life. All other things are of value only by virtue of their relation to human life. God is the creator of all this material wealth, but He is the Father of us. The family is worth infinitely more than the furniture. Is society in Christian America organized in harmony with this ideal? For example, suppose a man is running a shirt-waist factory. He and four assistants, let us say, direct the enterprise and ninety-five girls do the work, making a hundred persons, all told. The girls are paid less than a living wage. This means poverty, suffering and lowered vitality for want of proper nutrition. This diminished power of resistance, coupled with the temptations thrown in the way, and reinforced by the pinch of hunger, leads to moral as well as physical disease, and we have a festering sore which eats into the very heart of the community, poisoning some of the best young life in it. If some preacher protests, the owner replies that he pays the market price for labor, and sells the goods for all they will bring, and that this will not justify any higher wages. But the community ought to say to him that a business which is a failure for ninety-five per cent of the people who are engaged in it is intolerable in this day of enlightenment and efficiency, and that no man has the right to direct the labor of human beings unless he can do it successfully. A community which cannot see as plain a proposition as this—a community which thinks more of shirt-waists than of people, is hostile to Christ's whole program for human life.

This economic aggression with its injustice and disregard of the sacredness of human life, has spread to every quarter of our country and is doing far more damage to our spiritual life than many of us are aware. It is but one of the problems in our American life which are calling for solution, and which can be dealt with only through co-operative effort. There are Christians who apparently do not recognize social ministry as an essential part of the Christian program, and who belittle the whole matter by calling it a "soup-and-soap salvation." Others believe in social service, but they mean by this merely ministering to the suffering of the victims of our social order. There is much of this gracious work to be done. But our social order—or disorder—is doing indefinitely more damage than all our philanthropies can repair. There is a vastly deeper need than the need for soup and soap. There must be a broader social ministry than that of ameliorating the condition of the unfortunate individual of society, or even of the less favored groups of the population. Of course it is the very spirit of the Christian religion to take the part of the weak and the oppressed, and this will always be one of its chief tasks. But the work of directing all our social forces towards spiritual ends holds unlimited possibilities, for this would mean not merely the elevation of the lower stratum of society, but the lifting of the people as a whole to a higher plane of living, enriching the best as well as the poorest human lives, and increasing manyfold the sum total of spiritual life and power on this earth.